

Dave

Twin Inns/Kentner Family Oral History Interview

Interview with: Jacqueline Kentner Miller, Dorothy (Dee-Dee) Kentner Lee, and Edward (Bup) Kentner, Jr.

Date of Interview: June 2001

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Transcriber: Phyllis Straw-Roszkiewicz

Date of Transcription: June 2003

DKL: I'm the oldest of Edward and Neva Kentner's children.

JKM: I'm the youngest of their children.

EK: And I'm the only son.

SSG: Were you born at the Twin Inns?

EK: Yes, I was.

DKL: I was born in Los Angeles and came here with my folks in 1919 at the age of 7.

SSG: I read that your Dad worked as a chef or cook for Baron Long in the Ship Café.

DKL: Yes.

SSG: Your parents met in California?

DKL: Yes, they met at the Wheeler's Hot Springs, north of Los Angeles near Ojai.

JKM: My Dad was the cook at Wheeler's, and he also drove the stage that picked up people at the railway station to bring them to the hot springs. My Mom worked in the dance band at Wheeler's playing the melophone and the trumpet. My Dad and Fred Miller (no relation to my husband) came out here from Michigan, although my Dad was originally from South Bend, Indiana. I'm not sure how old he was; he was a young man. My Mom was about 16 or 17 years old. They met at Wheeler's and not too long after, maybe a year later, they got married.

DK: They were married in June. Then they homesteaded in Summit.

SSG: What brought them to Carlsbad?

EK: My Mom's sister, Fern Sayre, notified my parents that the Twin Inns was for sale, and they came down to look at it. Although Fern had been married for a time to the railway stationmaster named Atherton, she later married Loynal Chase and became Fern Chase.

SSG: How long had the Twin Inns been a restaurant at that time?

EK: At that point, we don't know. The ladies that had it were serving chicken and dumpling dinners, and it was called the Twin Inns.

SSG: I think that they were responsible for the willow-pattern dishes.

EK: Yes. They were.

SSG: So your parents moved down in 1919?

EK: Yes, November 5, 1919.

SSG: What was it like growing up in Carlsbad?

DKL: Wonderful!

SSG: Define wonderful. Why was it wonderful?

DKL: Well, for one thing there were no paved streets. Everyone was friendly. We lived on the beach.

EK: The Carlsbad Beach was only 50 yards away.

JKM: It was more accessible because there were no large houses to block the view.

There were also big wide stairs that went down behind the Carlsbad Hotel to the beach.

EK: I can remember riding my horse up the path lickety-cut. We used to have horse races between Carlsbad and Oceanside on the beach.

DKL: And my horse won! There was an old two-story schoolhouse where the grammar school [Pine Avenue School] is now. Our grandmother was the janitor there and that was a fun place, too. It had stairs and it was old even then. My sister was three years younger than I, and we walked back and forth to school, of course. Those are happy memories.

JKM: Dee-Dee used to talk about the Calavera School House and going to dances there. That was a fun time, I think, although before my time.

DKL: Well, Mom and Pop used to go over to the dances, and I can remember sitting and watching. I was too young to join the dancing. I also remember that Toots, my sister Catherine, and I would go down in the summer time to the railway station when the freight trains would come to make their deliveries to Carlsbad. They had watermelon then, and if any fell off and broke all the kids would gather round and grab a piece and sit there on the station stairs and gobble up watermelon. We would have contests to see who could spit the seeds farthest. Silly, what little things you remember.

SSG: Where exactly would you find the Calavera School today?

JKM: When we were growing up, we all rode horses a lot. I used to ride out to a schoolhouse that was east of the ^{Dunham's} Denham's; I think that was the Calavera School.

DKL: Yes, that's right.

JKM: The old Carlsbad Airport was near there. You go straight out Chestnut, and it was probably a couple of miles slightly northeast.

SSG: Do you know John Henley?

JKL: Yes.

SSG: The Henley's said that their house is right on the runway of the old airport.

EK: The hangers used to be on the cliffs.

SSG: What can you tell me about incorporation and the people involved?

EK: It think the reason it came about was that Oceanside wanted to annex the Carlsbad beach, essentially. And that led to the incorporation of Carlsbad, to block that annexation.

SSG: I've done some research and it seems that the city was kind of split between the business people who wanted to incorporate and the farmers who didn't.

EK: I don't remember there being much opposition at all.

SSG: I read that Charles Ledgerwood opposed incorporation because he thought that it would cause problems with the tax base for people in the agricultural sector. The vote was fairly close. After incorporation, was your home used by the city for meetings or to house fire trucks?

JKM: We really didn't have a fire department. We had a basement area of our house, and our Dad finished that off. When Bup (Ed Jr.) was growing up there was a hot rod club called "The Oilers" that met there. That space was turned into a kind of City Hall for a while. That's where Max Palkowski had an office. I remember that whenever there was an election Dad always enlisted us to drive people who needed rides to the polls to vote. I remember my Dad always saying, "I don't care who you vote for, but by God, you gotta vote!"

SSG: I suppose you knew everyone in town.

DKL: There weren't very many people, about 2,500 or so. ^{Delene} ~~Delene~~ Daleen Schutte, who was a descendent of the man who built the inn, was my best friend.

SSG: Can you tell me what happened with the murals?

JKM: J. Morton Patterson painted them.

SSG: Didn't Edna Knox help?

DKL: Edna Knox was an artist. I took lessons from her when I was nine, but I don't think she had anything to do with the murals.

EK: When we sold the Twin Inns, we let the guest register go with the building. The registers are a treasure of names, mostly Hollywood people. There are lots of famous sketches and drawings along the margins by artists that came in, too. My Dad started the guest registers in the 1920s. They were large red books with full Russian bindings. I ordered the second set when I was running the business.

DKL: Many movie stars came in.

EK: Pop was a cook at the Ships Café in Venice. After he left there to come to the Twin Inns, Baron Long would always make a point of stopping in for dinner when he went to the racetrack, probably about 1920-21. Jack Dempsey was a good friend. In those days of prohibition, there was a steady stream of people. The names and comments are in the guest registers.

SSG: What was it like during the depression in Carlsbad?

EK: Quiet. It sometimes seemed as if cars came down the road at a rate of one per hour. There just wasn't much travel.

SSG: John Henley said he played in the bank because it was empty.

JKM: The bank was closed when I was in the third grade. I had a girl friend whose family lived in the bank, almost camped. We used to play in the vault. It was full of stacks of empty brass 22 shells. We pretended that it was gold. There was also a huge stack of newspapers that we pretended was a mountain. The family lived behind the teller's window-counter. The entry was empty, no furniture, just a big pile of newspapers.

DKL: When I was growing up, there was no bank.

SSG: What did you do if you were ill?

DKL: Dr. George Getz took care of us; he was a wonderful man. Dr. George Darnell and Dr. Reed came later.

SSG: Did you go to their offices or did they make house calls?

DKL: They made house calls.

JKM: Once in a blue moon we might go to the doctor's office, but nine times out of ten they made house calls.

EK: Dr. Getz's house was down on State Street one door removed from the Ben Franklin Store, wasn't it? The old Post Office was across the street. Dr. Getz's son still lives in Oceanside; he was my sixth grade school teacher. Then he became editor of the Los Angeles Times Finance Section.

SSG: What do you think is the best thing about Carlsbad, either while growing up or now?

DKL: I guess everything. I recall how much fun the Fourth of July shows were that Pop put on. That was before any of the cities put on fireworks. He fixed up big mortars in front of the inn and he made really wonderful displays. I'll never forget how terrified I was that one might land on the roof of the inn. If one had, good-bye Twin Inns!

JKM: I don't remember the early shows, but I do remember Pop always ordering big crates of fireworks for the kids.

EK: He'd dole them out for a week or two before the Fourth.

DKM: I remember these little round things wrapped in red paper that you scraped around on the sidewalk. Lots of times they would pop up and burn your legs. We had a lot of fun with those things.

JKM: It was a very pleasant place to grow up. The weather was generally very good and the people were nice. No one thought about crime, especially. We'd just ride our horses everywhere. If I wanted to visit a girl friend, I'd just ride out to visit her. I can't imagine letting my kids go off like that into the boonies! Yet, our Mom was certainly not lax in her concern about our comings and goings.

DKL: It was a good place with lots of things to do: games to play, dodge ball...

EK: Before TV! We could go for a hike in a forest when it really was a forest.

JKM: Hosp Grove used to be a big forest, and that's where we rode our horses all the time.

SSG: What was it like during World War II?

JKM: I was 7 years old when the war broke out. The Army took over the forest and had a tent camp out there. The Marine Corps took over a service station that was across the

street from the Twin Inns and made that into an MP Station. The Cohn estate, later the Royal Palms Hotel, was taken over by the Coast Guard. I remember very clearly when the military came to look over the Twin Inns, walking around the inn with my parents and the big man in uniform. They decided that the inn was too big of a firetrap! So they didn't take us over. Of course, Camp Pendleton came on then and the whole town was absolutely surrounded by military: Army, Coast Guard, and Marines.

EK: They used to have gunnery classes where Terramar is now. That was exciting! We used to go down there and watch the antiaircraft units. They would fly a plane toward a target and four or five guns would go off in sequence.

JKM: One of my jobs in the evening was to go around and pull all the shades and curtains because of the blackout. You weren't supposed to have any light showing.

EK: North of the Twin Inns on the other side of Grand Avenue, it was all open country. Soldiers put their tents up there. They would occasionally use the shower in the barn where we kept the horses. It was very exciting at night with the searchlights on.

SSG: Did you know the Shipleys?

DKL: I don't really remember the Shipleys, but the lady who taught Sunday school was a relative of theirs, I believe.

SSG: Did you attend St. Michael's?

DKL: Yes, the little church was still just south of the Twin Inns on the curve.

SSG: Where the 7-11 is now?

DKL: Yes.

SSG: I've seen pictures of the gardens behind the Twin Inns. They look really substantial. Who was responsible for that?

DKL: Our Dad hired a Belgian named Roman Deschmitt, and he laid out the garden and planted it.

EK: He went back to Belgium, I guess.

DKL: We had a beautiful fishpond, very natural looking with bamboo and a little island in the center of it.

SSG: It must be painful to see it a parking lot now.

JKM: There were so many nice trees. I can't believe that they cut them all down.

EK: The monarch butterflies used to come in by the thousands. It was a stopping off place for them.

DKL: One of the trees was from Sherwood Forest in England. It came over as an acorn. Roman Deschmitt brought it.

EK: Roman built a log cabin in the garden, too. That was where he lived when he was setting up the garden. After he returned to Belgium, the cabin became lodging for a later gardener. After that, it was a garden house, and then storage shed.

JKM: The Cohn's garden was pretty spectacular. The whole cliff was terraced and landscaped.

SSG: Tell me about the Tootsie K Ranch. Did you ever live there?

JKM: All of us lived there at one time or another.

DKL: Pop had a reservoir above it. We always called it "Pop's Bar."

DK: I guess it's still there.

DKL: We saw a mountain lion there one time crossing the creek near the house. Pop built the house.

JKM: Pop bought the Tootsie K Ranch in 1943. During the early years of WWII, the man who usually supplied us with chickens died very suddenly and his wife decided not to continue the chicken farm. So for some time Dee Dee's husband, Art Morgan, and I, and sometimes Bup, would go out looking everywhere for chickens. We had a pick-up truck with cages on the back and we'd buy 20 here and 30 there and so on. It was almost impossible to keep the restaurant going with such an uncertain supply of chickens. In those days we didn't serve anything but chicken. We essentially rationed the number of dinners per night in order to keep the help employed all the time. Pop realized he couldn't keep running the business without an assured supply of chickens. So he built a chicken yard on the north side of the building with a lean-to structure and started buying day-old chicks from the hatcheries in Petaluma. Every week we'd get a batch of 1,000 chicks. We had 10,000 fryers and 350 layers, which we kept so that we would have eggs for the corn fritters. The chickens were butchered a thousand a week. We all worked at one time or another butchering chickens. The manure and the entrails went to the ranch. The ranch also had pigs and cows. We needed the lard for frying chicken.

SSG: It's pretty impressive that your Dad could do that, not being a farmer.

DKL: Pop could do almost anything!

JKM: Our father was very resourceful, a million years ahead of his time. From the time I can remember, and I was born in 1934, our kitchen was entirely stainless steel with all the glasses under cover. We had a huge steam table in the middle of the kitchen. All the dishes that were supposed to be hot were kept hot, and they would never serve a meal on a cold plate. All the ice-cream dishes were kept refrigerated. It was pretty unusual in those days, 75 years ago, to do those kinds of things in restaurants.

SSG: Did you ever get tired of eating chicken?

JKM: No.

EK: No, I still eat it all the time.

JKM: I eat it constantly. When we were young, if we were hungry before bed we'd go get a chicken leg and it was just great.

EK: Without giving away any family secrets, we never served skin from 1919 on.

SSG: You were really ahead of your time.

JKM: Absolutely, and Pop always had a special tray that had a screen in the bottom of it. When the chicken was dumped out to drain, new chicken was never put on top of old chicken. Chicken had to be crisp. It was cooked when people came in. It was never cooked and left to sit.

SSG: To this day, people rave about the Twin Inns chicken.

DKL: I miss it. I loved it.

SSG: What do you think is the worst thing that's happened to Carlsbad?

JKM: I say, the lack of trees. The streets used to be lined with trees.

JK: Elm Avenue was lined with trees from end to end. There was a small forest where Jack-in-the-Box is now.

JKM: One street was lined with olive trees, both sides.

JK: We used to harvest them.

SSG: I heard that Carlsbad had a western flavor. It wasn't the surfer area that it is today.

JKM: I think that's true. There were a lot of pretty horsy people around.

SSG: Why have you all moved to other areas?

JKM: In my case, my husband was offered a job in Hawaii, and we went with the idea of staying for a couple of years and possibly looking to come back. But we both liked it very much and we stayed.

DKL: Art and I lived here until he died. Then I remarried and my second husband and I bought a home here. Then we did a lot of traveling and found that it was easier to have a place where we could leave the dog at home so we moved to San Marcos for various reasons. My heart is in Carlsbad, of course.

EK: I just looked for seclusion; something I could afford that was out in the boonies. I miss the ocean.

SSG: Where did your Dad get the big chicken models? National Geographic did a story in 1934 on the Twin Inns and the huge chickens.

DK: Someone came and made them on the grounds.

JKM: We had a mold. At one time, there was a great big hen with some little chicks on the pedestal. One day the big hen collapsed; Pop said she sat down. Then Pop had the four big chickens made.

DKL: Those were plastic.

DK: We had many; there must have been 10 or 15 plaster of Paris chickens at one time. We used to line the parking lot when it was still gravel.

SSG: Do you have a photo of that?

DK: That was before the road was widened, and the parking lot was a lot bigger. I might be able to find a photo.

SSG: We've had several people call and ask us about ghosts. What's the ghost story?

JKM: There were some things that were unexplained. I didn't believe in it.

DKL: I did. We always closed on Monday evenings. My younger son was still in high school. One Monday the rest of the family went out for dinner, and he was left there alone. He heard someone walking in the attic—what everyone else always heard. It was very clear. He heard footsteps and what sounded like a cane. He got so upset that he left the house and wouldn't go back in until we returned. He wasn't the only one who heard it.

JKM: Well, I heard footsteps in the attic on occasion, but I didn't believe in it.

SSG: Who do you think it was?

DKL: It was Granddad, our Mom's Dad, he walked with a cane and he did die there. Another time when we were closed, I was up in the attic doing something. A female voice called, "Dee-Dee." I said, "I'm up here." No answer. In a little while, they called again. I went down the stairway and looked not a soul was there. The door was still closed up the stairs. This was in broad daylight and there was no way anyone else could have gotten in there.

JKM: I had the same thing happen, but you think there's got to be an explanation.